# Operation SEA ANGEL: Bangladesh Disaster Relief

*Operation SEA ANGEL once again proved the flexibility of Marine air-ground task forces and their ability to respond to almost every imaginable contingency that might arise. But the Bangladesh relief effort was far from just a Marine show; it was a total effort involving all the Services, various international relief organizations, and in-country government agencies.*

by Col Donald R. Selvage

On 29–30 April 1991 a terrible cyclone devastated the coastal islands and regions of Bangladesh. Approximately 150,000 people were killed and hundreds of thousands more were left homeless and without basic necessities. In response to this tragedy, a joint task force was established and Operation SEA ANGEL was launched to provide emergency and mid-term relief assistance to the affected population. An amphibious task force, composed of Amphibious Group 3 (PHIBGRU–3) and the 5th Marine Expeditionary Brigade (5th MEB), homeward-bound after five months in the Persian Gulf, received orders to proceed to the Bay of Bengal to participate in the operation. The commanding general, 5th MEB, BGen Peter J. Rowe, assigned his ground combat element, Regimental Landing Team 5 (RLT–5), responsibility for coordinating operations ashore. As mission commander, the commanding officer, RLT–5, established his command post at Chittagong, the port city at the northern end of the Bay. He subsequently assigned Battalion Landing Team 3/5 (BLT 3/5), built around the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, the task of setting up a tactical logistics (TacLog) center at a small, 6,000-foot airfield located in Cox's Bazar, the resort city on Bangladesh's southern coast (see map and Figure 1). From the TacLog, BLT 3/5 coordinated the helo and boat delivery of relief supplies to the stricken areas of Kutubdia, Materbari, Chokoria, and Moheshkhali Islands. The combined operation from Cox's Bazar involved Marine CH–46s and CH–53s, British SH–3 helicopters, U.S. Navy SEALs, Royal Marine small boats, and rigid raider craft. Over a 9-day period, nearly 700,000 pounds of relief supplies were delivered via boat and helicopter to ravaged areas.

BLT 3/5 played a small but unique role in Operation SEA ANGEL. The relief effort was a multinational affair bringing together civilian and military organizations from around the world. The U.S. military contribution involved a joint task force led by MajGen Henry C. Stackpole III (see inset).

The Cox's Bazar TacLog represented only a fraction of the task force's overall effort. Because of this smaller scope and the fact that the city was relatively isolated from the main effort at Chittagong, the mission was a natural for BLT 3/5. It presented distinctive challenges to the BLT staff to study the mission, look at the assets

# Unity Rewarded in Typhoon Rescue

### by LtCol Gary Anderson

The super cyclone (typhoon) that hit southern Bangladesh on April 28, 1991, was a disaster of immense proportions in a land that has seen many disasters.

In the areas directly in the storm's path, a wall of water 20 feet high swept inland three miles and completely inundated several offshore islands. As many as 150,000 people may have died in the storm and 1.7 million became homeless and hungry.

On May 10, the United States responded to requests for assistance. The help came in the form of a joint task force, commanded by Marine Corps Maj. Gen Henry C. (Hank) Stackpole.

By the next day, Gen Stackpole and key members of his staff were in Dhaka, Bangladesh, to assess the magnitude of the damage and request appropriate forces to carry out lifesaving relief operations. In a time of short memories, what followed is worth recalling.

The staff of the joint task force was comprised of Marines and sailors of the Okinawa-based III Marine Expeditionary Force. We were joined in a few days by experts on inter-Service staff work from Hawaii. The rescue force was augmented by Special Operations Forces personnel skilled in dealing with emergency situations in emerging nations, as well as by five U.S. Army Blackhawk helicopters.

When we first landed in Dhaka, there had been no conventional voice radio or telephone contact with our embassy. As a result our staff officers quickly huddled with Ambassador William Milam's country team, were briefed by the Bangladesh govern-ment as well as nongovernmental relief organizations such as CARE and the Red Crescent-Red Cross.

The key problem was immediately apparent. There were plenty of relief supplies, but the supplies were mostly in Dhaka while the disaster area was around Chittagong 120 miles to the south. Gen Stackpole and Mr. Milam emphasized that the government of Bangladesh would call the shots and set the priorities during the operation, while the task force and supporting forces from other nations (including the British, Japanese, Indians and Chinese) would provide transportation and medical services to alleviate the devastating aftermath of the vicious storm.

The Bangladesh government formed two coordinating committees. One operated at the national level in Dhaka and set priorities for U.S. C-130 flights to a forward staging base at the seaport of Chittagong; the second, operating at Chittagong, scheduled helicopter flights to outlying islands and coastal regions where the aid was vitally required. The committees were composed of representatives of the Bangladesh civil government, Bangladesh military, nongovernmental relief agencies, the joint task force and officials of the U.S. Agency for International Development. In both cases, Bangladesh officials chaired the committees and were responsible for final priorities in the relief operations.

Fortunately, a U.S. Navy amphibious task group with the 5th Marine Expeditionary Brigade aboard was swinging by Bangladesh on its return from the Persian Gulf after its participation in the recent war. This force stood offshore and contributed helicopters, medical teams and engineers as needed, while keeping the U.S. presence ashore to a minimum.

This was important in reducing culture shock between Western service personnel and local Bangladesh civilians unused to our technology, culture and customs. The ability to sea-base the relief operations meant that at any given time fewer than 500 of the more than 7,000 U.S. military personnel involved in the humanitarian effort were actually ashore.

Despite the heavy maritime expeditionary presence during Operation SEA ANGEL the effort could not have succeeded with the superb contributions of Green Beret assessment teams, Army Blackhawk helicopters and U.S. Air Force transport aircraft.

The days of unilateral U.S. service action are over; the distances and challenges involved in global peacetime and wartime contingencies will require joint service responses. Operation SEA ANGEL joined DESERT STORM in emphasizing this.

As always, the ultimate success of the operations was ensured by the young sailors, airmen, soldiers and Marines who actually delivered the supplies and saved lives on the ground. If Operation DESERT STORM showed that young Americans can fight with the best, Operation SEA ANGEL and PROVIDE COMFORT in Iraq proved again that Americans can be good friends as well as dangerous enemies.  USMC

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provided, and formulate courses of action. Complicating the standard command and staff planning sequence was the requirement to transpose combat skills to a humanitarian mission.

From this experience, BLT 3/5 learned many lessons that may be of assistance to other staffs in future relief operations. While each relief operation is different in scope and resources required, the following observations provide insight into some of the numerous considerations involved in one particular type of humanitarian operation. Some of these observations reinforce basic staff planning doctrine, others raise new issues.

## Operations Section

When planning and organizing for a disaster relief operation, the S-3 must consider the spectrum of possible BLT mission assignments it might be tasked to perform. Of course, this will be more focused whenever higher headquarter's warning and operation orders are received. However unique the situation, use of the command and staff action sequence (rapid or deliberate), planning and execution timelines, versatile task organization options, contingency planning, and collective brainstorming sessions or "murder boards" will help ensure operational success.

During Operation SEA ANGEL, the unit's mission was complicated by the fact that few individuals possessed much experience in disaster relief operations, and minimal intelligence information

**AIRSPACE CONTROL**

Tower

OIC of Working Party and Airfield Compound

BLT 3/5 Working Party + BLT 3/5 STA Plt → STA Plt Sgt Insert/Extract SNCOIC

S-3

Motor Pool

LNO

British AO 1

Blt 3/5 AO 2

S-4A Load Master

3

Small Boat Harbor S-4

Relief Control Center

Airstrip

LCAC Beach S-4
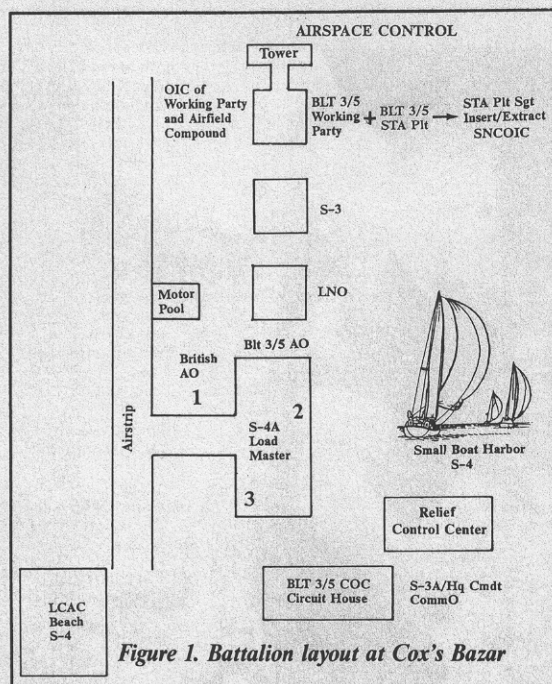
BLT 3/5 COC Circuit House

S-3A/Hq Cmdt CommO

*Figure 1. Battalion layout at Cox's Bazar*

| Potential Elements | Estimated Mission | Normally Tasked | BLT 3/5 Bump Plan | # BLT Personnel | BLT Equipment |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Examples:** | | | | | |
| Airfield Ctrl Det | Airfield Ctrl/ Coordination | MAG–50 MAC | AO/TACP | AO + 1 | PRC–113 PRC–77 |
| Small Boat Ctrl Det | Small Boat + LCAC Coord | BMU | S–4 | S–4 + 1 | PRC–77 |
| Helo Maint Det | Helo Maint | MAG–50 MAC | none | none | none |
| Comm Det | Comm Link to RLT, Ships, Cox's Bazar Area | MEB SATCOM Team | CommO | CommO + 4 | MRC–138 PRC–104 PRC–113 PRC–77 |

*Figure 2. Mission table of organization planning matrix*

was available on Cox's Bazar. With little more than 12 hours from initial notice to departure of the advance party, the brainstorming technique proved extremely valuable in quickly assembling a wide range of expertise. This expertise stemmed from Marines and Sailors with both military or civilian experience in disaster relief operations. The subsequent generation of ideas and innovations was extremely beneficial. The discussions resulted in practical elements of essential information (EEIs) and insights into disaster relief considerations and possible contingency requirements. To capture the variety of ideas, a mission planning format was used (see Figure 2). This format aided the staff in focusing on mission and task organization. Once the potential elements and missions were listed, it became easy to identify who normally executed those missions or responsibilities and then plan who would do them at the BLT level and what key equipment would be required. Also, a listing of available BLT assets (equipment, supplies, special skills) was prepared in menu format. The morning after the murder board session, the BLT advance party (BLT commanding officer, S–3, S–4, communications officer) flew to Cox's Bazar in order to conduct a site survey. After visiting the airfield, the local civilian relief control center, relief supply storage sites in the area, several U.S. Army Special Forces units, and coordinating with local civilian and military officials, a rapid situation assessment was developed. Utilizing the BLT's planning matrix and assets menu, we developed, mission requirements and equipment needed. Radio communication was established with the BLT command post aboard the USS *Vancouver* (LPD 2) and the proper mix of personnel and equipment to establish and sustain the Cox's Bazar TacLog was requested. Figure 3 shows the mission assignment, personnel/responsibility breakdown, and organization at Cox's Bazar. Once the functional groups were task organized and in place, command, control, and communications ($C^3$) nodes were set up. A combat operations center (COC) was then established within the TacLog to serve as the principal node for overall system coordination and tracking.

The COC, which was located almost two miles from the airfield in a central location, quickly became the nerve center of the entire relief operation. It had several important functions, including:

• Maintaining 24-hour COC operations.
• Tracking helicopter and boat mission assignments.
• Integrating various assets, personnel, and information requirements into the COC function.
• Preparing daily, time sensitive situation/progress reports for higher headquarters.
• Scheduling future operations (24–72 hours).
• Networking all operational and administrative message/radio traffic among ships and higher headquarters' COCs.
• Tracking the operational and logistical support of any units inserted into its zone.
• Coordinating with host-country liaison personnel.

These responsibilities are inherent in any unit's command post operations. However, a unit must be prepared to conduct all of these, and perhaps more, with a very small detachment. In particular, the tracking of information for ready reference and quick reporting is essential. During Operation SEA ANGEL, reporting requirements and scheduling demands were extensive. The COC contained charts showing the amount of relief supplies delivered by type, weight, and date, as well as the number of air and boat sorties conducted by country and type of transportation. For example, a typical chart would read, "25May91—rice: 4 tons; British SH–3: 17 sorties." Another chart listed both significant and future events for the remainder of the operation. A mission chart also ex-

| Element | Mission | Who | Location | C³ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Command Element | C² | BLT CO | Roving | Saber |
| COC/TACLOG | COC Functioning<br>TACLOG Tracking<br>Bangladesh Army LNO<br>HQ CMDT<br>  MED Det<br>  Comm Det<br>  Supply Det<br>  Motor Pool<br>    (Local Govt Veh) | S-3A<br><br><br>S-3A<br>PMT | Circuit House<br>(Govt Bldg) | MRC-138<br>PRC-104<br>PRC-113<br>PRC-77<br>Saber<br><br>Telephone |
| MedCAP | Medical Assistance | BLT Surgeon<br>Corpsmen<br>Civil Doctors | Circuit House<br>(Govt Bldg) | PRC-104<br>PRC-113<br>PRC-77 |
| Civilian Coord | Civil Govt Coord<br>Intl Agency Coord<br>VIP/PAO Coord<br>STA Plt Leader | S-2 | Civilian/Local<br>Relief Ctrl Ctr | Saber<br>Telephone |
| Log/Boat Coord | TACLOG Resupply<br>Small Boat/LCAC<br>Coord | S-4 | Small Boat<br>Harbor<br>LCAC Beach | Saber<br>PRC-77 |
| Marine Helo | Airfield Ground Ctrl<br>Pilot Zippos<br>On Order = Air traffic Ctrl | AO | Airstrip | PRC-113<br>PRC-77<br>Saber |
| British Helo | British Helo Ground Ctrl<br>British Pilot Zippos | British AO<br>(Subunit to BLT AO) | Airstrip | HF<br>UHF |
| Helo Loadmaster | Coord + Supervise<br>Loading of Helos | S-4A | Airstrip | Saber |
| Airfield LNO | Airfield OPs Journal<br>Passenger Manifests<br>Airfield Motor Pool | LAAD OIC | Airport | Saber<br>PRC-77 |
| Marine Working Party | Load Relief Supplies<br>  on Helos/Boats/LCAC | Plt Ldr<br>(Rotated 50 men<br>every 3rd day) | Airport | Saber |
| Air Traffic Control | Civilian Air<br>  Traffic Control | Bangladesh<br>Personnel | Airport Tower | UHF<br>VHF |
| Operations | Operations, Planning<br>Scheduling<br>Security<br>Deconfliction<br>Food/Agency Coord | S-3 | Airport/Roving | Saber<br>PRC-77 |
| STA Teams | Recon/Situation<br>Estimate at<br>  Designated HLZ sites | OIC: S-2<br>Each Team:<br>  Plt Cmdr (Lt)<br>  Corpsman<br>  3 STA Marines<br>Insert SNCO: STA PltSgt | Airport | PRC-104<br>PRC-77 |
| BLT LNO | HQ Liaison<br>Trouble Shooting<br>  at HQ for BLT | BLT LT | RLT TACLOG<br>Chittagong | HF |

*Figure 3. Mission assignment matrix*

...isted detailing air and boat missions by date, time, location, delivery area, passengers, and tonnage. From this chart, BLT boat and helicopter bump plans (alternate plans) were developed. Finally, due to frequent changes in priorities for delivery of supplies by host-nation relief organizations, a smaller chart showed food delivery priorities for the day. This chart enabled the COC to keep track of the daily arrival of two Marine and two British helicopters that landed at the airstrip, "drop dead" times for helicopter/boat extractions of medical personnel and recon teams, evasion and escape routes, and emergency rallying points.

Like any functional COC, a map with pins was established to show the location of all BLT and joint task force personnel throughout the Cox's Bazar area. As experience demonstrated, the information requirements of higher headquarters are extensive and time sensitive. The tracking and updating of information enabled the COC to coordinate activities among widely dispersed units.

On the whole, the diverse information requirements, wide-planning spectrum, and myriad COC functions closely resembled what one would expect to find in most low-intensity conflict (LIC) situations. Some examples include main-taining lists of civilian village officals (white, black, and gray lists); coordinating supply operations with local Bangladesh Army officials; organizing translators, civic action projects, and joint VIP/media events; processing civilian and political requests; tracking local political developments at the small village level; and, finally, attempting to resolve local civilian-government-military-international agency conflicts. Combined, this makes for quite a dynamic and challenging arena.

**Air Assets**

In a relief operation involving significant air assets, the air officer must be prepared to run an entire airfield. He must have the minimum essential personnel (should minimum footprint ashore be required) and all necessary communications gear, including handheld radios. If the operation is large enough and the assets are available, then the air officer should request augmentation from a Marine air control group (MACG) or tactical air control squadron (TACRON) in order to control aircraft. This will allow the air officer to function solely as the airfield operations officer. The Cox's Bazar TacLog was fortunate in that a host-country tower controller was available to control aircraft (and as it turned out to ensure cattle and other livestock were cleared off the runway prior to any aircraft landing). However, in an isolated area, such as Cox's Bazar, Marines will discover that civilian controller experience and proficiency will vary considerably. For example, during SEA ANGEL, the tower operator regularly was overcome by events when handling three or more aircraft, and helicopter operations significantly increased the airfield operation's tempo. Prior to SEA ANGEL, Cox's Bazar airfield only had two regularly scheduled commercial flights landing per week. Consequently, the air officer was forced to pay close attention to the traffic pattern and be prepared to forcefully take control of the situation when necessary to ensure safety, especially when working with foreign pilots. This often proved difficult because many host-country controllers and airfield managers were sensitive to the charge that U.S. Marines had come in and taken over their airfield. Should such a perception occur, airfield cooperation would have signifi-

cantly decreased.

During relief operations involving helicopter delivery of relief supplies, the air officer and logistics officer maximized the use of external lifts to increase operational efficiency. However, reliance on this mode of lift had to remain flexible since there were a number of passengers to move, such as doctors, mechanics, relief officials, media personnel, and host-government officials. The restriction prohibiting passengers on helicopters carrying external loads forced the air officer to make tradeoffs between external and internal sorties.

Finally, the air officer must ensure all pilots have standard maps listing drop zones and other navigation aids (no mean feat when maps are scarce and photocopies are the norm). Experience from Cox's Bazar demonstrated that face-to-face "zippo" briefs for the day's first sorties greatly alleviated this problem.

**Logistics Considerations**

During Operation SEA ANGEL, there were some preconceived notions that the logistics officer quickly discounted once ashore. Initially, it was anticipated (worse case contingency) that the command would coordinate a complete supply network transporting supplies from warehouses to the airfield, loading helicopters and distributing goods to individual citizens. This proved incorrect. Since the cyclone had struck over two weeks prior to the command's arrival, several key host-country distribution centers in the outlying islands had ample supplies. Further, the Bengalis were prepared to deliver supplies from warehouses on these islands to the airfield at Cox's Bazar. Thus the requirement proved to be more than providing emergency relief to individuals. Instead, most of the effort went into stockpiling supplies until ruined fields could be replanted and harvested again. Therefore, while some assistance was required to ease immediate needs, most efforts focused on stockpiling stores for long-term use.

One of the methods used for delivery of supplies was small boats. While each boat could only carry approximately 800 to 1,000 pounds, the small boats significantly increased delivery capabilities. These boats worked best when used in short shuttles to nearby islands, vice single, long trips to distant areas.

Initially, air cushioned landing craft (LCACs) were considered ideal for this mission. However, at Cox's Bazar this proved impractical due to local constraints. The entire coastal area is flat, low land with numerous islands and water inlets. This topography, combined with aerial and boat reconnaissance, revealed several suitable locations for LCAC cushion landing zones (CLZs). However, problems surfaced when determining how to transport 40 tons of supplies from the CLZs to the inland distribution site. The ravaged islands lacked both vehicles and roads. A further foot reconnaissance from the storage area to a planned CLZ made apparent the local inhabitants' inability to transport supplies to the distribution site. The route from the beach was at best a cart path and in some areas traversed through flooded rice paddies. We learned quickly that LCAC operations were much more complicated than expected. Just dropping 40 tons of supplies on the beach was impractical when no means existed to further transport the supplies inland.

While the logistics officer focused on LCAC operations and overall logistics concerns, the assistant logistics officer concentrated on organizing, staging, and preparing helicopters for air movement of relief supplies at the airfield. Basically, he ran the loading operation. In this role, the assistant logistics officer maintained a detached point of view regarding the priority of movement of supplies. Frequently, questions arose about why one stricken island was receiving more supplies than another. However, government relief organizations determined the areas of priority, not the BLT. Accepting this fact greatly reduced frustration and increased our efficiency.

As evidenced by SEA ANGEL, helicopters are the most preferred method of distributing refugee supplies to Third World countries. The best method for their delivery is via external loads. Fuel consumption is smaller and loads are netted in advance. The average time for aircraft to hook an external load is around one minute, vice the 10 or more minutes needed to load internally with working parties. Without forklifts, pallet jacks, and other essential equipment, the increased bur-



*Scenes from SEA AN-GEL. Top: Tons of building material are delivered to the ravaged island of Sandwip via LCACs. The operation, which was originally titled PRODUCTIVE EFFORT, was renamed SEA ANGEL after Marines in LCACs and LCUs began appearing over the horizon carrying badly needed supplies. Middle: Army and Marine personnel help unload supplies off a CH-46. Bottom: Bangladesh children show their gratitude for the relief effort.*

den of internally loading helicopters is extensive. As it was, Marine working parties of 50 men per day were required for loading purposes.

**Intelligence Requirements**

In Operation SEA ANGEL the intelligence officer became the intermediary between the BLT, the government, and nongovernment relief agencies. Working out of the Cox's Bazar Relief Control Center, he quickly became familiar with the bureaucracy and the people running it. The S-2 also found himself seeking out information of all types—from determining suitable landing zones to obtaining facts on specific damage to villages.

More than likely, the threat to any unit engaged in disaster relief is minimal. The major threat is usually found in the areas of health or safety. Nonetheless, the intelligence officer must be aware of local sentiments and sensitivities that could possibly be provoked by opposition groups. One pitfall was the perception that Marines were playing "favorites" in delivering relief supplies of certain organizations (e.g., Red Cross, CARE, etc.) to preferred areas. The intelligence officer can best monitor such undercurrents by working closely with relief organizations and keeping contact with a wide variety of local people who have a feel for what is going on and how American relief efforts are perceived.

The surveillance and target acquisition (STA) platoon was also on hand, using its skills to aid the relief effort. STA teams were inserted into landing zones throughout the Cox's Bazar area. These teams consisted of three men from a STA platoon, a corpsman, and a lieutenant. The STA platoon sergeant acted as the insert/extract officer.

Once inserted, the STA team's mission was to make liaison with the Bangladesh Army, local village officials, and any national or international agencies operating in the area. They were also to evaluate the need for a STA presence, the condition of the area, and the effectiveness of the relief effort and report back to the COC any problems or specific needs they uncovered. The lieutenants came from BLT units remaining on ships and were included based upon recommendations from several U.S. Army Special Forces teams operating in the area that an officer with each STA team

would expedite dealings with the Bangladesh Army detachments, relief agencies, and village bureaucracies. The information the STA teams provided to the COC proved invaluable in putting together a picture of the relief network, the damage created by the cyclone, and an assessment of the effectiveness of the relief effort and future requirements.

**Medical Capabilities**

The Medical Civic Action Project (MedCAP) proved extremely beneficial to the Center at Cox's Bazar. Over five days, a small medical team supplemented by local doctors visited 5 sites and treated over 1,800 people for a wide variety of ailments. The MedCAP provided immediate goodwill and support for the American relief effort. A battalion surgeon can greatly increase the chances for successful MedCAPs by considering the following factors:

First, it is essential to make liaison and coordinate efforts with local medical officials to identify areas requiring assistance. This coordination can alleviate one of the biggest limitations pertaining to MedCAPs—translators. Second, corpsmen can see patients with supervision, but each person seeing patients needs his own translator to be efficient. Most villages had at least one person who spoke English well enough to satisfy this requirement. Finally, coordination can ease problems associated with local religious and cultural prejudices as to who will be treated—it will not, however, eradicate them. During SEA ANGEL, problems were encountered when Moslem officials objected to a MedCAP visiting a Hindu village.

Sick call blocks of medical supplies aboard ships do not meet the needs of MedCAPs. Local medical officials and relief organizations provided both supplies and guidance on prevalent diseases. Immunization requirements were the same as those required of all active-duty Marine personnel. In addition to these, in most Third World countries, Immune Serum Globulin is required to prevent hepatitis and requires a booster every three months. Despite cholera being present, the cholera vaccine was not used due to its unavailability and low effectiveness. Cholera was prevented in deployed troops through the use of good sanitation and safe food and water brought in from the ships.

We discovered that a medical doctor can see approximately 150 people in a day. For support he needs two assistants to disperse medicine, bandage wounds, start intravenous solutions, etc. If there is a language barrier the team will need at least one translator per doctor. The size of the MedCAP team should be determined by the number of people needing treatment and limitations of available transportation. BLT 3/5's MedCAP team was task organized with one battalion medical officer, three corpsmen, two local Bangladesh doctors, one civilian translator, and a battalion radio operator. MedCAP personnel need to be in good physical condition and capable of operating communications equipment (HF, UHF, VHF) or come task organized with someone familiar with communication gear.

## The Communications

Good communication is as essential in relief operations as it is in combat—and just as subject to the hazards of weather, location, and maintenance. During SEA ANGEL, communications had to be maintained with amphibious ships, the Cox's Bazar airfield, 6 helicopter landing zone teams scattered throughout the area (some as far as 30 miles away), higher headquarters at Chittagong (60 miles away), several MedCAPs, and various local relief agencies. Throughout SEA ANGEL, the BLT used unencrypted HF communications to a great extent. Most HF usage was pure ground-wave propagation, as the low frequencies used prevented the effective use of long-range sky-wave propagation. High powered radios (MRC-138s) were used for the passage of vital command and control ($C^2$) information between BGen Rowe at Chittagong and the TacLog center at Cox's Bazar. These radios performed well, even during periods of degraded HF communication. However, most of the HF radios on the BLT operation were low-powered manpacked radios (PRC-104s), used primarily by STA and MedCAP teams at remote helicopter landing zones. Without the power to push out a strong ground wave and without proper frequencies to obtain effective sky-wave propagation, these teams experienced difficulties during periods of degraded HF communications. If continuous HF communication is required, then alternate HF frequencies are essential for the planning and execution of sky-wave propagation.

## Coordination

The BLT assigned a liaison officer to higher headquarters in Chittagong. His role was sort of as a jack-of-all-trades, charged with dealing with the next echelon of command and troubleshooting for the BLT as problems arose. Before assuming such duties, the liaison officer must be made fully aware of his unit's mission, his commander's intent, his unit's strength, his assets, and what available resources he has available. During relief operations he must be familiar enough with numerous facts and figures concerning load and weight capabilities of lift assets to be able to crosscheck them with relief agency resources and supplies, e.g., how much supplies can an LCAC carry as compared to eight CH–46 flights? He is also responsible for maintaining contact with all lift agency representatives and distributing unit and intelligence reports as needed. He is critical in ensuring the command gets its share of transportation assets and its requests receive timely action. His role is vital to the success of any relief operation.

Every staff section in the BLT was involved in Operation SEA ANGEL. In addition to those specific functions listed above, other staff requirements were accomplished from aboard ship. Although the adjutant never came ashore, he and the S–1 section were kept busy with the normal administrative requirements of a BLT. Supply pushed food, water, and other needs ashore daily.

The order to maintain a "minimum footprint" ashore forced the BLT to limit the number of Marines participating from the companies. Fifty-man working parties rotated through Cox's Bazar every other day. They were used only at the airfield because government officials desired that local labor be used as much as possible. This practice did not decrease efficiency at all; in fact, supplies were always delivered on time to the airfield and harbor, which actually increased the public's perception that real teamwork existed between the Marines and the Bangladesh people.

The acute desire to ensure that this operation was a joint effort, accomplished equally by the joint task force and the Bangladesh Government, surfaced regularly. We were always aware that our mission was to augment the relief effort, not to shoulder aside the government representatives and do it on our own. We controlled the assets necessary for distributing goods; the Bengalis acquired the relief supplies, delivered them to an airfield or harbor, and designated where they were to be delivered. Because of professionalism and a universal desire to get the job done on both sides, an effective partnership was forged. This sensitivity to sharing the mission—whether stemming from national pride, political exigencies, or both—was real and a factor that will probably be present in any similar operation.

Less tangible, but just as real, were the rewards of accomplishing a mission that saved lives, while working with people truly grateful for our help. Every Marine who participated in Operation SEA ANGEL was touched by the warmth and sincerity of the Bangladesh people, whose dignity amidst a terrible disaster will never be forgotten.

US MC